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SUBJECT: SPANISH EX-DEFENSE POLICY DIRECTOR REFLECTS ON  
ZAPATERO, AFGHANISTAN, US

Classified By: DCM Hugo Llorens for reasons 1.4 (b) & (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. Francisco Torrente, a retired admiral who stepped down in January as MOD Secretary General for Policy, told DCM during a private lunch on March 26 that Spain would staff the NATO-ISAF headquarters in Kabul beginning in summer 2008, after national elections. He acknowledged that the uniformed military generally dislikes President Zapatero because of his domestic policy and some foreign policy mistakes, but said that Zapatero has tried to do the right thing not only in Afghanistan but generally in relations with the US. According to Torrente, regular high-level visits from Washington would reassure Spain that the US takes it seriously and would pay dividends in good feeling and increased cooperation. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) BIO NOTE: Torrente retired two months ago and is now employed as the chairman of EXPAL, an explosives and munitions company. He confessed that his position is not demanding and that his responsibilities as chairman are limited to monthly board meetings and occasional PR- and sales-related travel. He still spends most of his time in Madrid, visiting MOD weekly, but is building a retirement home in northwestern Spain. Torrente's wife has been seriously ill. He said that he had been trying to leave MOD since September 2006 in order to spend more time with her, but that Defense Minister Alonso insisted he stay. Torrente agreed to stay through the November 2006 NATO Summit in Riga, but when Alonso then asked him to further extend to run the February 2007 NATO ministerial in Seville, Torrente threatened to walk out.

¶3. (C) Torrente said that the Spanish officer corps' overwhelming dislike of President Zapatero and its concern about his naivete and lack of foreign policy experience crystallized around two incidents: then-opposition leader Zapatero's failure to stand when the US flag passed in a military parade in 2003 and the hasty Spanish pullout from Iraq that Zapatero ordered in 2004. Despite its instinctive dislike, Torrente said that the Spanish military is entirely professional and loyal and tries to see the positive in Zapatero's policies, assessing that he has generally tried to do the right thing in NATO and Afghanistan.

¶4. (C) As an example of Zapatero trying to do the right thing, Torrente cited Afghanistan, where Zapatero has delivered significant military and development assistance, and is committed for the long term. He noted that the opposition Popular Party's domestic political attacks have made a bad situation worse by preventing Zapatero from sending more troops at this time. Torrente said that his own understanding is that there is a need to send more Spanish troops to both the Regional Command-West and to staff the NATO-ISAF headquarters in Kabul and that Spain will do so when the domestic political situation changes. In fact, he

said that Spanish CHOD has already been in touch with the NATO military structure with an offer to staff the ISAF HQ beginning in August 2008. By that time, Zapatero will have either won an election, in which case he would be able to fulfill such a pledge without fear of his far-left partners, or the PP would have won, in which case it would naturally fulfill the pledge. Torrente noted MOD's gratitude that Defense Secretary Gates and the USG had not pressured the GOS on this issue at the time of the Sevilla NATO ministerial.

¶5. (S) On the recently concluded negotiations over regulations governing the activities in Spain of the Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS) and USAF Office of Special Investigations (OSI), Torrente said that the GOS was always supportive of NCIS/OSI's traditional force protection and criminal investigative functions, but had some concerns about other NCIS/OSI activities that went beyond the traditional areas. He said that major Spanish parties shared a sense of the need for greater accountability, noting that it was the previous PP government that had begun discussions with the US on this issue. Torrente expressed particular appreciation to the Embassy and EUCOM for their efforts to get the issue resolved. He said that the final document was a good solution for both sides that would make 99 cases out of 100 completely routine.

¶6. (C) As a final thought, Torrente noted that the US-Spain relationship is still fragile. He said that the Embassy and, on the military side, EUCOM do their part, but that it would be helpful to get senior Washington policymakers to Madrid regularly. Torrente said that by reassuring Spain that the US takes it seriously, such visits would pay huge dividends in cooperation and good feeling.

Aguirre